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ABSTRACT

Two liberal arts faculty members in international politics and foreign languages collaborated to develop a series of annual international trade conferences sponsored by Clemson University as a way to bring the liberal arts college into direct contact with both the business college and the business community. Also, the conferences provide a setting for faculty and students to interview business and government representatives. They can then use their data as a primary source for research and teaching materials. The theme of the first conference in 1982 was exporting for profit, and the second was international economic interdependence. The third conference took the form of an off-campus trade show in manufacturing and agriculture. The series has helped to stimulate campus interest in international affairs and to promote contacts and cooperative agreements between the university and the business community. They have been successful in blending humanistic and technical elements in a land-grant institution. Two recent grants, for an international internship and an agricultural literacy project, have added impetus to the interdisciplinary aspect of the program. The conferences have also assisted in student job placement and stimulated ideas for further innovative, interdisciplinary program development. (MSE)

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LIBERAL ARTS RAPPORT WITH THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY THROUGH INTERDISCIPLINARY TRADE CONFERENCES

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LIBERAL ARTS RAPPORT WITH THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY THROUGH INTERDISCIPLINARY TRADE CONFERENCES

The idea for an annual series of international trade conferences to be sponsored by Clemson University came about several years ago as a result of the collaboration between two Liberal Arts faculty members--one an international politics expert and the other a foreign language specialist. These two professors had earlier written an international studies minor proposal and successfully guided it through the necessary curriculum channels. Since this minor required course work in political science, foreign languages, geography, and economics, it was decided that some activity should be planned which would establish linkages among these departments, in order to support and market the new minor. Economics at Clemson is a part of the College of Commerce and Industry, so the initial trade conference was also viewed as a means of bringing the College of Liberal Arts into direct contact with both the business college and the business community. The probability of their asking us to co-sponsor such an event was practically nil, so preparations were made to present our proposals to the dean and associate dean of the business school.

The draft proposal we prepared for that meeting was geared toward a conference built around a rather general theme of international studies and international business; however, it soon became clear that this rather esoteric idea simply had no appeal to our more technically

oriented business colleagues. A more practical approach would be necessary in order to gain their confidence and support. As luck would have it, that very day a trade specialist from the District Office of the International Trade Administration of the U. S. Department of Commerce had visited with the business dean and expressed an interest in exploring ways in which his agency might cooperate with the business college. Right before our eyes the magic triad was evolving--academe, government, business--and Liberal Arts was a part of the dream.

This was the beginning of an extremely fruitful relationship between the International Studies Committee of the College of Liberal Arts and the U. S. Department of Commerce. Two trade specialists, one who would later become the Director of the District Office, were eager to work with us on a week by week, month by month, year by year basis in order to plan and promote an annual trade conference. We found ourselves the beneficiaries of a wealth of trade expertise, enthusiastic support staff, and friendly assistance, all of which would make it possible for Clemson University to co-sponsor an annual series of conferences designed to bring business, government, students and teachers into a mutually beneficial relationship. And all this would be realized with very little hard cash, just a lot of hard work. These conferences can provide the setting for faculty and students alike to interview business and government representatives and use their data as a primary source for research papers or teaching materials in technical writing courses, business foreign language courses, or speech classes.

Under the prestigious sounding title of "First Southeastern International Trade Conference," the series was launched in 1982 with a "nuts and bolts" conference on "Exporting for Profit." The program was designed as a seminar for business personnel, to provide indepth counseling on the latest procedures of the federal, state, and local governments to aid businesses in successfully entering the field of exports and to explore the resources available through private, commercial, and educational institutions. Primary co-sponsors, along with the U. S. Department of Commerce, were the College of Commerce and Industry and the College of Liberal Arts at Clemson.

The 1983 conference, "International Economic Interdependence," brought in the College of Agricultural Sciences as a major planner, along with Liberal Arts and the U. S. Department of Commerce. This second conference in the series provided a forum for the discussion of problems affecting United States international trade, with the objective of formulating a foundation for solutions which could guide future trade policy. Prominent on the program were representatives from banks, agricommodities companies, the U. S. Department of the Treasury, the European Economic Community, and the Foreign Agricultural Service of the U. S. Department of Agriculture.

The 1984 conference, Export '84, was moved off campus to a neighboring population center in order to attract more walk-in registrants. By this time the list of co-sponsors had grown to ten, including the S. C. State Development Board, the S. C. Appalachian Council of Governments,

and the S. C. District Export Council. The two-day trade show provided the manufacturing and agricultural community the opportunity to meet with representatives of service organizations that could assist them in exporting their products and services. In addition to exhibits of export management companies, freight forwarders, steamship lines, consulting firms, universities, and government agencies, there were eight workshops conducted on such topics as export financing, export success stories, exporting to the Near East and the Far East, and exporting various kinds of products: agricultural, high technology, textile machinery and apparel.

The common denominator that has held all of these conferences together has been the participation of the faculty and students of Clemson University, particularly those in Liberal Arts. This series has played an important role in stimulating campus interest in international affairs and promoting contacts and cooperative agreements between the university and the business community. Moreover, key sessions have been videotaped for the purpose of building up a videotape library for presentations both on-campus and in the community.

Another very important by-product of these joint ventures has been the blending of the humanistic and technical elements in a land-grant institution. This is of paramount importance both to the students and the faculty, in order that the artificial barriers that traditionally have separated a liberal and a professional education may become bridges of understanding. The intercollege alliances that have been

established have remained a dynamic and cohesive force in fostering a spirit of cooperation and innovation among the faculties and administrators.

Two recent grants have added impetus to the interdisciplinary thrust of support that has developed from the trade conference series. The Business and International Educational Program (Title VI, B) of the Higher Education Act, administered by the U. S. Department of Education, matched Clemson University's 1985 funding of the development of an international internship option within Clemson's Cooperative Education Program; and the Kellogg Foundation is funding an agricultural literacy project between the Colleges of Agricultural Sciences and Liberal Arts.

The internship grant was administered jointly by the Department of Languages, the Department of Agricultural Economics, and the Co-op Office. The enabling legislation was specifically designed to "develop linkages between institutions of higher education and the business community involved in international economic activities." The way had already been paved by the first trade conference; and the second and third trade conferences framed in the grant year. Contacts from these trade conferences proved indispensable in the job development necessary in order to place students into international trade related positions.

It was soon realized that an expanded internship program would be an integral part of a proposed new Liberal Arts major in Language and

International Trade, based on the Eastern Michigan University model. But unlike EMU, students at Clemson would choose an area of concentration in departments that are traditionally strong at this land-grant institution--international agriculture, textiles, or tourism. All of these areas are extremely important, not only to improving the U. S. balance of payments generally, but each contributes in a unique way to the mission of Clemson University as it establishes a prototype for other land-grant institutions. In the case of textiles, this new international perspective might help solve some of the problems of a dying American industry. The promotion of agribusiness through an international agriculture option is naturally of prime concern to an institution like Clemson. International tourism, the third option, has already assumed a major role in the economy of South Carolina. In 1982 alone the state's European Marketing Program brought in an additional 26,000 visitors whose spending was logged as export income in the balance of payments.

The proposed interdisciplinary degree program with its three technical options combined with a required internship would provide language majors with a practical laboratory for testing their abilities to analyze facts, reach logical conclusions, and find workable solutions in an international environment. This scenario of success, however, can only be realized through the on-campus/off-campus network which has been nourished by the annual international trade conference series.

The most salient point on which the new degree program would be predicated is the importance of combining the technical and humanistic aspects of a student's education into a meaningful whole. A land-grant university, such as Clemson, provides a rich environment for such a blending, but historically this has not been the case. A major hurdle toward accomplishing this goal has already been resolved in the pre-grant agreements, negotiated among the four colleges concerned. And the international trade conference series laid the groundwork by proving that liberal arts can descend from the ivory tower into the marketplace, that foreign languages do have an important role to play in international business, that cultural sensitivity may, indeed, be the ultimate marketing tool.

Today's Liberal Arts students, among other students, are more career oriented than in the past several years. It is desirable to reach this important segment of the student population with a major which allows them to apply their humanistic orientation and creativity to the world of work before they enter the job market. The business contacts made and nurtured through the ongoing international trade conferences will provide a wealth of opportunities for liberal arts students to explore career opportunities and accumulate professional experience before graduation.